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Senate calls for governor's signature to protect Great Lakes

LANSING – The Senate sent landmark legislation to the governor today that would allow states to work together to prevent the further invasion of aquatic nuisance species in the Great Lakes, Sen. Patty Birkholz, R-Saugatuck Township, announced.

“Swift action is needed to prevent this pollution that reproduces from devastating our Great Lakes ecosystem,” said Birkholz, sponsor of the Senate Bill 332. “We urge the governor to sign my bill and House Bill 4603 quickly before more damage is done. Working together with other basin states is a key step in keeping our waters clean and healthy.”

SB 332 would authorize the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality to enter into an agreement with other Great Lakes basin states to create the Great Lakes Aquatic Nuisance Coalition. The coalition will be charged with eliminating this damaging form of biological pollution in the Great Lakes. The legislation also establishes a new regulatory process for guarding against discharges of ballast water from ocean going vessels.

“Protecting the Great Lakes from pollution that reproduces is vital to the well-being of Michigan's residents and its economy,” said Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming. “The Great Lakes are an irreplaceable piece of Michigan's future. Congress has been promising action for decades but nothing has been done. It's time Michigan and the other basin states took matters into our own hands.”

There are currently 162 aquatic nuisance species in the Great Lakes, including the sea lamprey, zebra mussel, spiny water flea and Eurasian ruffe.

Aquatic nuisance species are commonly introduced to the Great Lakes through ballast water discharge from ocean-going vessels. Although laws are in place to prevent ballast water dumping, certain exemptions in the federal Clean Water Act are still allowing this harmful practice to continue. Because of the exemption, more biological pollution is being allowed in the Great Lakes.